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ABSTRACT

Women can benefit from sports activities across the entire continuum from play to professional. Women have been catapulted into serious sports training and have been able to contend for more sports opportunities due to the evolution of clothing reforms, more acceptable sports, the right to vote, and the right to control pregnancy. Women have gained much from their growing participation in sports at all levels, such as improved health; releasing muscle and nervous tension; self-expression and self-esteem; and development of leadership, followship, cooperation, and the willingness to sacrifice for the group toward a common goal. Women need to value physical activity and act on that value by choosing to participate. Women have the right to participate on all levels of sport and are entitled to opportunities, training, availability, access, gender equity, and support. The well being and empowerment of women as vital members of society are the benefits beyond winning. (Contains 11 references.) (JDD)

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Introduction to Modern Women in Sports: Beyond Winning

There are quite a variety of physical activities and exercises that one can engage in for pleasure. Activities that have recognizable locomotor movement, involve practice, competition against a standard, self or others to gain a prize are distinguished as being sports. Sports run the gamut from play to pro. Play is more spontaneous with no specific goals or rules; play is more process oriented with improvement, nurturance and having fun primary. On the other hand, pro sport is more organized, with clear standards and serious practice dominant; pro sport is more product oriented with winning being paramount. In order to accommodate the ever increasing needs of sports enthusiasts, sporting activities need to be functioning across the entire play to pro continuum.

Many participants are cognizant of the benefits of regular sport activities beyond the product orientation of winning. An increasing number are valuing the process of their participation which includes; health, fitness, wellness, team work, self-expression and self-esteem benefits.

Women can especially benefit from the play to pro range of participation. Victorian femininity traits and early myths about womanhood are fading. Women are active members of society; participating in such diverse areas as law, medicine, politics and business. Sporting choices are essential too. Choices which include encouragement to pursue any of the play to pro sports activities that can empower women to become vibrant members of society. We must recognize and acknowledge all the prizes or benefits and not neglect play for pro or visa versa.

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Throughout the history of women's sporting participation there have been an incredible number of myths regarding the possible hazards of vigorous sport to women. The general attitude of the myths suggests feminine weakness and fragility, with added negative implications toward child bearing. (Dyer) Indeed Dr. Arabella Kenealy, in 1899, suggested that a human being has a fixed amount of energy to expend and if women insisted on engaging in physical activity, they would be unable to fulfill their traditional "womanly duties." (Twin p. 35)

Through time, acceptable sports categories for women have emerged. Many women's sports were considered extensions of dance. They emphasized gracefulness, accuracy and coordination and included the possible use of a light implement . Unacceptable sports for women included field events, and sports that involved attempts to physically subdue opponents by body contact, direct application of force to a heavy object, and face-to-face opposition where body contact may occur. (Cashmore p. 95)

Many would - be sportswomen of the 19th century were feeling the unwise and unjust effects of not being able to participate in sports. Foremost in the mind of Frances Willard, a late 1800's women's rights advocate, was the curtailing dress code which limited women's participation. Willard stated, "My 16th birthday brought about new dress, the hampering long skirts, accompanying corset and high heels. From that time on I always realized and was obedient to the limitations thus imposed, thought in my heart of hearts I felt their unwisdom even more that their injustice." (Twin p. 104) The unwisdom was health related , the injustice a social paradigm yet to be fully realized.

In the early 1900's a strong violation of acceptable sports for women was introduced in the form of a game called basket ball. Senda Berenson introduced this direct confrontation and contact game in 1892 at Smith College. The game, however, gave women the opportunity to work on behalf of group, to make sacrifices for others with whom they shared a common objective and to function in

coordinated roles. Other things being equal, team sports training was looked on as having a positive discipline and training effect on those who participated. Women were often considered inferior for certain jobs and roles because they lacked team sports experience. The editor of the Outing Magazine in 1912 noted that ... women have not the background of games of strength and skill that most men have and that their powers of correlation are correspondingly limited and their ability to cope with sudden emergencies inadequate. (Twin p. 28)

A new era had begun with a simple leather ball and peach basket. James Naismith had invented basket ball and Miss Berenson had taught it to the young women students at Smith College. More opportunities to fully participate in society would follow.

The mental and physical qualities of sports participation were always recognized as beneficial for men. Now increasing numbers of people would identify the benefits of concentration, perseverance, judgment, loyalty to leaders, submergence of self, grace, poise, courage, strength and endurance as qualities that are as valuable to women as to men. (Twin p. 59) Indeed the whole idea of women as attractive objects rather than skilled and effective athletes was of primary concern in the book The Second Sex by Simone de Beauvior who discussed sport as a way of experiencing oneself in the world and of asserting one's sovereignty. Through active participation in sports, women were finding energetic ways to express themselves; something that was previously done passively through dainty and gracious domestic and social activities.

No small part of the sports activity changes were clothing changes which freed women to be more active. Healthier lifestyles and confidence to pursue other activities such as work and career followed. The unwise health effects of the early 1900's dress, which Frances Willard lamented, were used by feminists to object to current clothing styles. The long skirts swept the ground, collecting the unspeakable filth that lay ankle-deep on the contemporary streets; they were voluminous and difficult to handle. Tightly corseted waists rearranged the vital organs, encouraging the frequent and well-advertised feminine ill health. A multitude of petticoats dragged at the waist. Tight garters interrupted the circulation in the legs. Low necks and flimsy shoes invited

pneumonia. (Riegel p. 390) Feminists speculated that women's clothes were the result of a male conspiracy to make women subservient by cultivating in them a slave psychology. Feminine apparel was designed consciously to hamper women's movements and thus prevent them from earning their livings except through marriage. In Susan B. Anthony's words, "I can see no business avocation, in which woman in her present dress can possibly earn equal wages with man." (Riegel p. 391)

Perhaps the most important creation yet to affect women was the invention of the bicycle. With the safety bicycle there was freedom to move from place to place independently. Independence of this sort encouraged women to pursue other independencies as well. "For women the bicycle became a vehicle of liberation from domesticity and isolation." (Mc Grun, On Your Bicycle p. 100)

Modifications of the "Bloomer" reappeared as women cyclists braved the city streets and country lanes to ride. In 1895 Frances Willard wrote of the many benefits of the new locomotion, "Sitting erect on the 'wheel' the thighs never make even a right angle with the trunk, and there is no stasis of blood in the lower limbs. Moreover, the work itself makes the rider breathe in oceans of fresh air." As to her own mastery of riding Willard commented, "In obedience to the laws of health, I learned to ride. I also wanted to help women to a wider world, for I hold that the more interests women and men can have in common, the happier will it be for the home." (Willard, How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle p. 73)

And so the freedom to ride the bicycle helped women toward a greater social and political freedom which culminated in the right to vote in 1920. For 37 years Susan B. Anthony came before the congress to plead the right for women to vote. She died in 1906 never to realize this right. As a pioneer advocate for women to have the power to decide their own fates, (vote) Susan B. is praised by Ida Husted Harper in her biography of Miss Anthony. She states: "Every girl who now enjoys a college education; every woman who has the chance of earning an honest living in whatever sphere she chooses; every wife who is protected by law in the possession of her person and her property; every mother who is blessed with the custody and control of her own children -- owes these sacred privileges to Susan B. Anthony beyond all

others." (Harper)
Margaret Sanger was another emancipator and as a reformer she changed political, economic and social circumstances. Her use of science and education in birth control shaped human conduct and enabled women to take charge and have choices in child bearing. She mobilized elite wealthy 2nd generation college women to advocate medically sound and reliable contraception which would force the redistribution of power in the home by giving women the same sexual freedom that men had. For women athletes her advocacy enabled serious sports training and participation without pregnancy interruptions.

Clothing reforms, more acceptable sports , the right to vote and the right to control pregnancy all helped to catapult women into serious sports training and to contend for more opportunities in sports. Still lacking were models. "If boys and girls hear nothing about women's achievements, they grow up with the man-minded idea that women did nothing worthwhile, that courage, perseverance, intelligence, and other desirable qualities are peculiarly masculine." (Harper) Eleanora Sears, Glenna Collett, Helen Wills, Sonja Henie, Mildred Didrickson, Althea Gibson, Billie Jean King, Chris Evert, Joan Benoit and Martina Navratalova became visible models and provided leadership for women to participate in sports. Even the dominant male sport of weightlifting is being infiltrated by women lifters and body builders putting an end to the myth that strength is a male quality unworthy of female interests or efforts.

Women have gained much from their growing participation in sports at all levels. Many have broken loose from the traditional bonds and goals of male competitive athleticism and gained prizes (benefits) beyond winning. Such prizes as improved health; using physical activity for cardiovascular fitness and wellness; releasing muscle and nervous tension, dispersing mind clutter and renewing energy and alertness. Self-expression and self-esteem are also enhanced by participation in sports. Women need avenues of expression and showing sovereignty in a personal way. Confidence to move and to control oneself is fostered with the regular use of skill, endurance and strength.
Team activities are especially good for developing leadership, followship, cooperation and the willingness to sacrifice for the group toward a common goal. These traits are

especially important if feminism is to grow in the work place, the home and in sports participation.

More and more sports participation is being valued for its positive effect on both males and females. The gender gap is narrowing. This androgyny is supported by Dyer when he states, "What seems to be happening in sports is that the differences between the body images and some of the gender characteristics are being reduce. This convergence of gender characteristics - androgyny - is an attractive ideal to many people. It is an attempt to combine the physical virtues of each gender - not for women to be "masculinized" or men to be "feminized" but for both to be humanized and enriched." (Dyer p. 226)

At home and kindergarten during a girl's early years she is told not to be rough or competitive. Boys get a much better deal. Incentives, such as praise, recognition, status and prestige seem to be much more available for them than for girls in sport. The taboos, mores and value systems of traditional western society have tended to suppress what natural competitive drives women might possess and to enhance those of men. (Dyer p.101)

The recent boom in women's sports is apparent everywhere. As increasing numbers of women and girls become athletes, it is reasonable to expect women to feel better about their bodies and confident that they can achieve what they want, whether that be Olympic gold medals, leadership positions in government, motherhood or all of the above. The question, according to a Women's Sports Foundation Survey, is no longer whether or not women should participate in sports, but how their participation will continue to change the image of the American woman and perhaps, the nature of society itself. (Women's Sports and Fitness Magazine Jan 1986)

Every woman should be educated to know the health and wellness benefits of regular active participation in sports. Medically "Sports will finally become a complete vehicle for the pursuit of fitness and health, ensuring a physically sound society." (Haycock p. 412) A woman should have the right to participate in any level of sport she chooses. The prize is the future health and well-being of the individual in society and the

collective possibility that sport, as a creative expression, can make us more human toward each other and promote egalitarian choices that are based on knowledge, experience and opportunity.

The messages for women in sports beyond the product orientation of winning are many. First, women need to value physical activity and then to act on that value by choosing to participate. Individuals and society must embrace this first value. Women have the right to participate on all levels. They are entitled to opportunities, training, availability, access, gender equity and support. The well being and empowerment of women as vital members of society are the benefits beyond winning.

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Dr. Koehler received a B.S. degree from Winona State University and her M.S. and Ed.D. degrees from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. (1965, 73, 78)

She has spoken to many professional and interest groups and attended professional conferences including the National Wellness Conference and the Himalaya International Conference on Holistic Education. Her publications include: "Teaching Stress Management in Secondary School Physical Education Programs" Ideas II for Secondary School Physical Education, March 1984, "Stress Management for Children", Strategies Nov-Dec 1987, "Stress Management in Athletics and Academics" Women's Coaching Clinic Sept. 1988, "Wellness at Gustavus" The Eye of the Needle Jan-Feb 1990, "Women Need to Take Care of Themselves: Give Yourself a Break" Heterodoxy March 1990 Vol. I Issue 6, "Breaking Barriers Through Relaxation Techniques" Coaching Volleyball Aug-Sept 1990, "Teaching Stress Management at the College Level: Theories and Practical Implications" Wellness Perspectives: Research, Theory and Practice" Fall 1991. Dr. Koehler has recently published her own Book of poetry "Something to Hold Onto" 1990 and two relaxation tapes "Personally Yours" 1991 and "Simply Take Time" 1993 with routines for sports improvement, children's relaxation, self esteem, meditation and general relaxation.